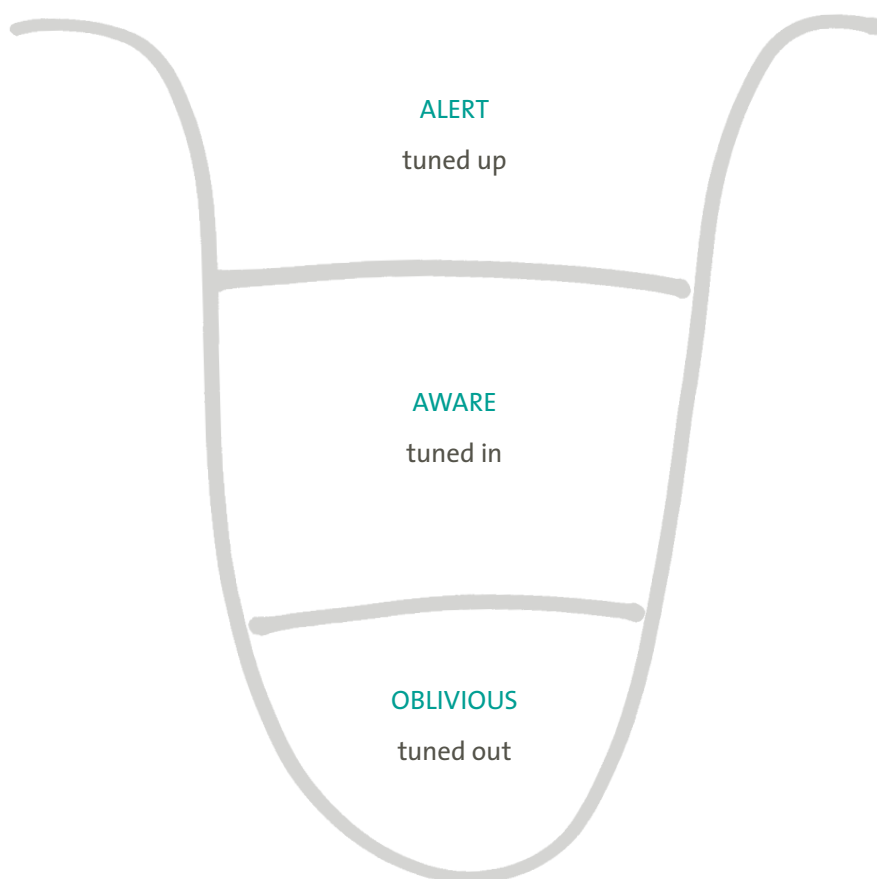


“As the world becomes more competitive you need a deeper and more subtle understanding of your unique capabilities. You do not gain competitive advantage by copying what others have done.”

Know what you know! The tacit knowledge in your organisation is a powerful strategic asset, but being hidden, is often overlooked. Become attuned to your tacit knowledge and create new possibilities for products, services, methods and processes.

THE STAGES OF ATTUNEMENT



Competitive advantage comes from a combination of what you *have* and what you *do* with it. You have to *do* something that is valued by your target market and you have to *do* it in a way that your customers prefer over the offerings of other suppliers. The 'doing' component of the equation is the one that usually gets all the attention because most people seek action – but often there is only a shallow understanding of what the organisation *has*.

Often, there is an emphasis on *getting*. People think they need to buy in new skills or technology in order to pursue their chosen strategy; however, innovative strategy is often a matter of using what you already *have*. Your existing skills and capabilities are what truly differentiate you from your competitors and these are harder to copy than something that is available on the market for anyone to buy.

Competitive advantage is built on strategic assets. These are intangible things like intellectual property, firm culture, knowledge, skills, systems, brand awareness and image, secured distribution and relationships with suppliers, customers and intermediaries.

The question "What are we good at?" is often answered in a superficial way. If you say "We are very good at running insurance claims" or "We print very good brochures" – that is not unique to you. What is it about the process that you do well? Understanding what enables you to do some things well helps you to do other things well and to exploit those capabilities to your advantage. People get impatient with the process of thinking. They want to move on and *do* something. Do not accept glib and shallow answers; probe for the subtle and perceptive ones.

Your business is unique. The path it has followed and the people in it make it what it is. No other business has precisely what your business *has*. 'What you have' includes your knowledge and your expertise. There is a hidden source of competitive advantage embedded in how you do what you do.

The knowledge gained from years of experience is 'tacit' knowledge. It includes complex insights, embedded routines, mental checklists and repertoires of exemplars. This knowledge is so ingrained in you, so intuitive, that you take it for granted and overlook its value.

Digging below the surface to articulate your unique knowledge requires a lot of thinking and questioning. Your unique attributes do not shout – they whisper quietly. If you want to leverage your tacit knowledge you must first become attuned to it.

Is your business tuned out, tuned in or tuned up?

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TUNED OUT

In this state, you are oblivious to what you know. You may be very productive but this only works to your advantage in the short-term. You keep busy, respond to demands and do the work simply to get it done. Once the work is complete you move straight on to the next thing without stopping to reflect on what you have learned. You are not listening for the subtle things you know and can do. You only hear static, like that from a badly-tuned radio, or you hear nothing at all. Businesses operating in this state have only a superficial understanding of 'what we are good at'. If you do seek to innovate, your first question is "What are other people doing?"

TUNED IN

In this state, you are starting to 'hear' what is on the new radio frequency. You review the work you have done to identify what you have learned from it and what new capabilities you have developed, both as an individual and as part of a group. You begin to question your assumptions about the 'correct' way to do things. In order to capture new insights you are receptive to different points of view and other possibilities. You regularly reflect on *how* you do what you do. You are becoming aware of your tacit knowledge as a source of competitive strength.

TUNED UP

This state is like that of a musical band – ready to play. You are alert and ready to use your capabilities fully. Because you know what you know, you are equipped to use that knowledge deliberately. You are constantly on the lookout for new opportunities, asking yourself "Where and how could we use what we know?" You understand that you don't gain competitive advantage by copying others. You stimulate your mind, reading widely and seeking new experiences, knowing that these will trigger new ideas. Instead of reacting to circumstances, you now make things happen for your benefit.

One way of tuning in to what you know is by debriefing at the end of a project. Knowledge is not static; it is always increasing. Every piece of work produces wisdom that could be articulated and shared within the organisation. When a project is finished, don't just put it behind you and move on to the next one. Take some time to reflect on what accounted for your success or what new skills and knowledge you developed. This means looking beyond the obvious and considering various types of learning.

Another way of becoming attuned to what you know is to teach it to others. This requires you to ask yourself questions such as "Why do I do it this way?" "How exactly am I doing this?" "What alternative approaches would there be?" When you have to train someone who is new to your field it forces you to express what you know. As a result, you discover that you know much more than you thought you did. You start to realise that what you know is not at all obvious to others but is the result of the individual path you have taken.

USING WHAT YOU HAVE – CLEGGETT WINES

Have you tried the new White Cabernet Sauvignon? You'll probably say "Yes, it's very trendy". But I'm not talking about Sauvignon Blanc. White Cabernet Sauvignon is different and produced *only* by Cleggett Wines of Langhorne Creek, South Australia. They make a 'bronze' Cabernet Sauvignon, too.

[Another way of becoming attuned to what you know is to teach it to others.](#)

So how did these wines come about? In 1977, two bunches of grapes were found on the Cleggett property that were bronze in colour. Mac Cleggett took cuttings and propagated them. Some years later, two more bunches appeared that were golden-white in colour. So he propagated those as well.

Cleggett vineyard is currently the only place in the world that grows these grapes – mutations of the normally red Cabernet Sauvignon grape. When the CSIRO tested the grapes, they found both varieties to have the same DNA as the parent Cabernet Sauvignon grape but the skin had undergone a genetic change.

What can we learn about innovation from this story?

- Firstly, someone noticed the variations. They knew what to look for. Then they made the effort to show them to Mac (Cleggett). These changes were only small and could easily have been ignored or overlooked. Breakthrough developments often start with small things that observant people notice. Do your people mention little observations of things they see happening around them?
- Mac was attuned. He paid attention to and took an interest in what his land was producing. What is happening in your business that is new and different?
- Mac saw the variations as something interesting and special – not as defects to be ignored or discarded. Do you pay attention to different ways of doing things or do you see differences as mistakes to be corrected?
- Mac experimented with propagation whereas it would have been easier to focus on the grape varieties he had already. It's easier to keep doing what we've always done. Are you willing to experiment, take risks and make the effort to create something new?

Through their efforts, the Cleggett family made history and developed unique new grape varieties and wines.

They just used what they had – a few funny-coloured grapes.

What do *you* have that could be the start of something new and unique?

Companies that are attuned to their uniqueness will build competitive advantage over those that have only a shallow understanding of what they do well. When you are attuned to what you know, that knowledge may be applied, in innovative new ways, to develop new strategies, products, services and processes. What's your uniqueness? Use what you have to get what you want!🌍



Shelley Dunstare

SHELLEY helps business leaders to innovate for competitive advantage. She is a passionate believer in the value of human ingenuity as an unlimited resource. When facilitating strategic discussion, she uses thought-provoking questions to generate in-depth conversation. She will take you beyond good ideas to great ones.

Her skills in questioning were developed through years of working as a commercial litigation lawyer with major law firms and she has also taught practical legal skills to law graduates. In addition to legal practice and training, her experience spans marketing, business consulting, recruitment and career mentoring.

Shelley is a perceptive problem-solver who applies her unique mix of rigorous thinking and creativity to a wide variety of client challenges.



Mo Fox

MO is an expert in creativity, branding and communications, with extensive experience across a large range of industries and blue chip brands both here and in London. A self-professed 'ideas junkie', Mo has a passion for creating ideas and solutions that are not just clever, but are relevant and sticky enough to make a lasting difference. She believes that the best way of doing this is to go beyond formulas and to work instead with the organic creative processes that already exist within every person and organisation.

After fifteen years as an advertising executive and strategist and seven years as a practising artist, Mo launched Red Thread Collaborations to bring the two disciplines together. Her workshops and seminars are known for being energetic, engaging and transformational. Mo has a unique skill in using art techniques to challenge people's assumptions of what they 'can't' do to make them more resourceful in applying what they 'can' do to achieve fabulous results.